

Attn: Trista Etzig  
Docket Clerk, Fruit and Vegetable Programs  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.  
Stop 02043  
Washington, DC 20250-0243

On behalf of Wittmer Farms Inc, I am providing comments in response to the April 20, 2006 proposed rule: Specialty Crop Block Grant Program; Notice of Request for Approval of a New Information Collection. My Father, Ron Wittmer and I, Mark Wittmer raise 230 acres of processing tomatoes for Red Gold Inc. I also raise 2 acres of carving pumpkins, and 1 acre of sweet corn for our road side stand.

We would like to highlight two major concerns with the proposed rule:

1. The rule is inconsistent with the clear intent of Congress when it passed the Specialty Crop Competitive Act in 2004 (Public Law 108-465) and will limit consumer choice by excluding the promotion of all types of specialty crops – including canned fruits and vegetables.

Section 1290.4 of the proposed rule: Eligible grant project, states that:

- (a) To be eligible for a grant, the project(s) must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

**Priority will be given to fresh market specialty crop projects.**

This language is inconsistent with the authorizing legislation and will limit competitiveness and ultimately consumer choice. Congress did not intend for one form of specialty crop to be given priority over others, nor to restrict state departments of agriculture from promoting a variety of specialty crops. USDA has exceeded its regulatory authority in giving preference to fresh specialty crops.

2. The rule does not recognize the growing body of evidence on the benefits of canned fruits and vegetables.

The proposed rule is counter to federal guidelines on nutrition. The **Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005** identifies canned foods as a way to help people consume the recommended daily variety and amount of fruit and vegetables. Nowhere in the Dietary Guidelines is preference given to **Fresh** fruits and vegetables.

On behalf of Wittmer Farms Inc. thank you for considering these comments. We urge USDA to issue a final rule that is consistent with will of Congress and recognizes the

importance of promoting all types and forms of healthy and nutritious specialty crops. As proposed, this rule will restrict promotion efforts and is counter to open competition. It also does not reflect current scientific knowledge of the importance of all types and forms of fruits and vegetables in promoting health.

Sincerely,

Mark Wittmer

Wittmer Farms Inc.

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